

We have all heard that parental involvement in schooling greatly improves a child's ability to learn, which is why homeschooled children often do so well on standardized tests, but how does this effect preschool age children? Do preschool age children whose parents are actively involved in their child's learning process, and who provide learning activities for their kids do better than children who just go to preschool? This is the question that researchers at the University of Massachusetts and Long Island University, C.W. Post Campus asked as they studied 163 preschool children, mostly from low income families, and their parents and teachers. Teachers rated the level of parental involvement, and preliteracy skills were assessed with standardized tests. [You can read the full text of that study here.](#)

Their findings were no surprise to early childhood professionals -- parental involvement was directly related to higher preliteracy scores on standardized tests. What does this mean for kids? It means that the more involved and supportive a parent is in a child's early learning and education process, the easier it will be for that child to learn crucial literacy skills later on.

This also means that if you want your child to excel in learning, as a parent you need to be actively involved in your child's learning process, and you cannot expect that your child will get everything that he needs from his childcare or preschool environment alone. So, how can parents be more actively involved in their child's learning? Often we as parents are so busy! I envy my sister just a tad, because she is a stay at home mom who homeschools (which doesn't work for everyone), but if you're like me, on a typical morning, I wake up, rouse the kids out of bed, help my preschooler get dressed, and I make sure the two older boys get dressed, feed the cat, and get out the door and on their way to school with some food in their stomachs before rushing my three year old off to daycare so I can get to work on time.

The childcare that she goes to includes fairly intensive academic preschool instruction where she learns to write her name, letter recognition, and even basic Spanish language instruction. She has a wonderful teacher, whom she absolutely adores. Will she be ready for kindergarten when the time comes for her to go? Probably, but here are a few simple things that we can do as parents that will ensure that our kids are not just ready to learn, but ready to excel:

1. **Provide a learning friendly environment.** I do this by providing easy access to books. We have a bookcase with two shelves that are within child's reach full of children's books. What about torn pages? Books are expensive! Good question. I buy my books cheap, so the sound of ripping pages, although discouraged, is not a disaster. Just last week I purchased several books in nearly new condition for only .25 each at a thrift store. Other great places to find cheap used children's books are at the library, (they almost always have a shelf full of books that they are

selling to make room for new ones. What a great way to support the public library system!) and in the summer, garage sales. You can also buy used books online through amazon.com. One more way to get cheap books is to make them yourself. Some of my kid's favorite books are laminated pages with pictures and simple stories, hole-punched and tied together with string. you can also make a book in a similar way out of reclosable sandwich bags and photos or construction paper and pictures cut out of magazines.

2. **Read to your child at least 20 minutes a day.** We hear this all the time, and it is true, so keep doing it! If you have older kids who can read, let them share in the responsibility of reading to the younger children while you listen. Model reading and story telling techniques like vocal inflections and using different voices for the different characters in the story. Ask your children questions about the story and illustrations as you read, and then have them give it a try. It is so fun to hear my 11 year old son reading to his younger siblings using high pitched little voices or gruff dinosaur voices!

3. **Limit the amount of time your kids spend with games and T.V.** Some alternatives are letting them help you measure and stir while you prepare dinner. My 3 and 6 year old children LOVE to be the chef! Young children love helping, and this also provides rich learning opportunities that will enhance their emerging literacy skills.

4. **Have a place where your child can draw and color.** Scrap the coloring books (they're too expensive anyway!) A ream of printer paper, or a roll of newsprint paper and some crayons or colored pencils goes a long way, especially if you encourage them to use both sides of the paper. Supervise them while they are using scissors and crayons or markers, unless you don't mind artwork on the walls or other places around the house. . . I have a huge purple permanent marker scribble stain on the arm of my sofa that will not come off!

5. **Provide a few high quality educational toys like blocks, shape sorters, etc.** Research the best toys for your child's developmental stages. It isn't necessary to have every trendy new toy. I have cut our toys back to blocks, plastic zoo animals and dinosaurs, a dollhouse and dolls, a baby doll and stroller, an assortment of toy cars and trucks, plastic food, a toy cooktop with dishes, and a few stuffed animals. If your kid's toys are always on the floor and they are not being played with regularly, then you probably have too many. Can you say "yard sale?"

6. **Take your kids on educational outings,** such as to the zoo, or the children's museum. Even a trip to the grocery store can be educational -- when they say "Will you please buy me that!?" you can say "do you have any money?" and then let them figure out the cost and if they have enough money to buy it. It's a great way to teach children about how money works and it is a lot more effective than just telling them no. Let them help you choose produce, and talk to them about why you are buying certain things. This can give you the chance to point out different prices, content on food labels, and to discuss the nutritional value of different foods with your child.

7. **Take your children to the park.** This gives them a chance to socialize with other children and practice their gross motor skills such as climbing and jumping, and can give you a much needed break!

8. Ask them to bring you a certain number of items. for example, ask them "can you get me three ___?" Help them count out the items if they still can't do it on their own.

9. If your child is attending a preschool, get to know her teacher and visit or volunteer in your child's classroom.

If you are unable to donate your time, get involved by asking your child about the activities she did during the day at her preschool or childcare. (You can even do this in the car on the way home.) Let your child show you what they learned by singing you a song she learned, or by practicing counting, or whatever it is that she was working on that day. You can ask the teacher what they did while you are picking up your child to give you an idea of questions that you can ask her about her day.

10. Talk to your child and answer his questions, even if you have to say "I don't know, let's go find out!" Children are so curious and are always asking questions especially during the preschool years! I remember all of my kids passing through the "Why?" stage. It was sometimes very frustrating, especially when I had answered the same exact question numerous times. I finally began turning the question around to them after answering at least 3 times. After they were able to vocalize the answer of their own question, it seemed to satisfy them enough for them to move on to the next question . . . Be patient and remember it is a natural part of a child's developmental process!

These are all things that you can do to be more involved in your child's learning process. Ready!Set!School! also provides activities designed to be completed in a short amount of time, that you can do with your child in four different learning domains. Remember that preschool children have short attention spans, so whatever activity you choose, it will need to be short, engaging, and to the point! If you focus on things that interest your child, it will be easier to get them to participate.